

The skills mobility of the black middle class has been singled out as one of the major problems facing organisations which now also have to deal with the alienation of the non-designated groups – who respond with their *feet*. SIKONATHI MANTSHANTSHA seeks a solution.

FOOTWORK



LEADING HUMAN resources and change management practitioner Ntombi Langa-Royds has placed the responsibility of retaining skills while diversifying the economy through transformation on the human resources (HR) industry. She says HR must be innovative and help organisations to retain their skilled people, while at the same time attracting and training a new diversified workforce.

Langa-Royds has been a human resources practitioner for the past 20 years and is also a change management lecturer to middle and senior managers at USB Executive Development Ltd (USB-ED), which

provides internationally accredited executive development programmes countrywide and beyond. Langa-Royds also lists people-centred subjects such as diversity and staff retention as her areas of expertise.

She says the country must make painful and uncomfortable decisions with regard to transformation. While protecting minority groupings, South Africa's institutions of learning and those of business have to embrace expansionist policies that would attract the wider global community to the country.

Langa-Royds says there are two sides to transformation: the positive

and the negative. Businesses have to embark on what she terms 'positive discrimination' to expand the skills base, and help the diversification and transformation process. By positive discrimination she means it is sometimes necessary not to appoint the best candidate, but instead to handhold someone else and upgrade him or her a desired level through re-skilling where there is a mismatch of skills.

"We need to increase the number of people available to learn the skills," says Langa-Royds. "You have to discriminate against somebody to get things right. But that's a temporary measure."

This, however, has the effect of alienating the best candidates and sends them packing for Sydney! "Emigration is a natural reaction ... but one has to realise the situation is temporary! It is positive discrimination that is necessary now; it's not going to go on forever," says Langa-Royds. "People have to try hard to help pull others out of positions created by the discrimination of the past."

She says the skills emigration that has been attributed to transformation and affirmative action is also good for South Africa as those that emigrate eventually do come back. "When they come back, they are better workers. It's a good thing for professionals and artisans to go and see what's on the other side."

However, Langa-Royds believes the country has to look at sustainable methods of increasing the skills pool. The first thing to do is to retain the skills that institutions currently have by impressing on the non-designated groups (whites) that they are part of the future. She says: "People are not leaving because there are opportunities elsewhere, but because they think they are not part of the future."

People managers also have to 'think out of the box' by appointing people not necessarily qualified in the

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available, they must also go out and encourage a diverse group – particularly blacks – within their own companies to take up the challenge, Langa-Royds advises.

To retain skills, she says HR practitioners and management have to be creative and try to delay skilled employees who want to leave. "They will go anyway. They do not leave because they are disloyal, but because they are ambitious and won't stay in one place where there are no growth prospects."

Langa-Royds says studies have shown that, on average, skilled workers spend the first year in a position learning, and the next two adding value, but leave soon thereafter.

That is where HR practitioners have to step in and create more challenging positions to forestall people from seeking challenges elsewhere. Says Langa-Royds: "You need to be inventive and on the alert, and find them another job to delay the move. You are just one of their options after three years, so you have to make it worthwhile and challenging. Such innovativeness would help to delay the departure by perhaps another two to three years while they are learning the new responsibility." □

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traditional skills for which there is a need. She says HR practitioners have to be proactive and encourage a diverse pool of potential candidates to participate.

Langa-Royds says it is not only people who have degrees in the relevant field that can do the job, but also those that are qualified in other areas. She points to herself as a law graduate who has been involved successfully in human resources. Having practised in the people management field for the past two decades she feels she has a lot to contribute, both theoretically and practically. "I have walked the walk; I don't only teach theory – I am also practical," she says.

Human resources practitioners must not only be happy to accept applications when new opportunities become



Ntombi Langa-Royds,
lecturer in change
management at USB-ED